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TAGS: KNNP PGOV PREL IR

SUBJECT: DOMESTIC ENRICHMENT MAY NOT KEY PRIORITY FOR IRANIANS

CLASSIFIED BY: Jason L Davis, Consul General, Dubai, UAE.
REASON: 1.4 (d)

1.(C) Talking to Iranians in Dubai about the nuclear issue, Dubai's Iranwatchers increasingly get the sense that the Iranian government is overstating its case when it says that the Iranian nuclear program is an issue of national priority for the Iranian people. It may be an issue of national pride, and it may be a priority for the government, but that is not the same as a strategic priority for the people. The government has attempted a propaganda campaign to try to make it a national priority, but we see little evidence it has succeeded. The average Iranian we meet agrees that nuclear energy is beneficial for the economy and of course doesn't like the idea of being bullied by other countries. Some have been convinced by their government that without domestic enrichment there is no energy program, but many we've talked to indicate they don't care if the uranium is not enriched on Iranian soil.

2.(C) We certainly don't get the impression that the average Iranian believes it is an issue worth going to war over. Many are suspicious that their own government is pushing this issue to create an atmosphere of crisis for its own advantage. They believe there are much more serious economic issues that need addressing in Iran than uranium enrichment. Of course, few would tell a U.S. official that they support developing nuclear weapons. Many seem as nervous as we are about their government getting its hands on nuclear weapons -- for domestic more than external reasons -- fearing that would prolong the regime's grip on power.

3.(C) Iranians seem quite nervous about what's to come and are scared of the prospect of war, which the majority of the people we talk to -- even those who say flat out they want a change of government -- say they don't want. Only a rare few say they want the U.S. to undertake an Iraq-type action in Iran. Most are weary of violence after the revolution and the Iran-Iraq war and are nervous about the course of events in Iraq.

4.(C) Our conclusion is that when the Iranian government sits down at the international nuclear negotiating table, it knows it does not have the support of the nation behind its demand - at seemingly any cost - for uranium enrichment in Iran.

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